

Death Shall Have No Dominion

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Summary: What happens when Cortana wakes from death to find herself a human woman? Many stories deal with this moment after it occurs. This story explores her reaction to the moment she is awakened by the Master Chief. One shot.

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><p>"Though they go mad they shall be sane,<p>

Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;

Though lovers be lost love shall not;

And death shall have no dominion."

â€• Dylan Thomas And Death Shall Have No Dominion

* * *

><p>She's the flagship of the UNSC Fleet and a ship of the line. From bow to stern, she boasts a length 5,694.2 meters and a width 833.3 meters. Give or take a Spartan or two she held a crew compliment of 17,151 souls. The technology she possessed is so advanced, most of the highly trained crew must have a Top Secret clearance just to steer her or fire the guns. They are proud of her and their accomplishments. Her Skipper is a fine, brave man and a first-class officer. Majestic, proud, and fierce the UNSC *Infinity* glides purposefully through space under his careful watch.

Alone in the swirl and eddy of this activity a singular man watched the busy ship and crew go about their duties. One or two Marines, who know him from past missions, nod as they pass. Yet, other than to throw up a hand or say hello, the rest of the crew don't speak to him. The young Spartan IVs stare at him as if he's some relic they just discovered. Most of them are in awe of the Spartan II and do not know what to say. He wanted to reassure them that he is just like them. But he has no words for that and realistically, both in size, training and experience he is nothing like them.

A skilled and successful soldier, he's won many awards for his courage and valor. Earned on the battlefield, the colorful little ribbons represent nothing more to him than the dead he failed to save. The pieces of himself left with the bloody corpses, surrounded by the screams of the Marines as they died. The anguished cries of the wounded, as they learned, they are, in fact, mortal. He thought of his brother and sister Spartans, who are so far away from him now, he can no longer reach them. The only companion of these last lonely years was Cortana.

To combat the loss, isolation, and disorientation he takes refuge in duty. Duty is what he knows. Move, Fight, Live. This is the only thing he knows for sure. In his heart, he also knew Cortana will not come back to him. But the growing nightmare of silence in his head kept him from accepting that truth. He knows she is gone, his logical mind cannot deny it. Yet he still listens for the sound of her voice. Still turns his thoughts toward discussing something with her. She was as real and meaningful to him as an arm or leg and her death left the ghost pain of that amputation behind. An emotional agony of grief, gnaws at him, goads him into despair, and threatens to drown him in a morass he's not sure he knows how to relieve. More than once, he's found himself standing on the loading ramp wondering what the freedom of space might have to offer. The edge seemed closer each time he approached.

Move. He knew the dimensions of the ship, not because someone told him. He knew it because he's so good at judging distances he is easily able to compute the measurement. He walked the distance 425 times. He tried running it once to escape the desolate silence inside his head. But the Officer of the Deck asked him to stop because it distracted the sailors from their work. An apology died on his lips. If he is able to move quickly, it is just a fact. He cannot help what he is.

Fight. They removed his armor after the destruction of Requiem and the Didact's ship. Every day, he asks about it, and every day they tell him the same thing. They granted him their friendly, smiles and reassured him it's under repair. Until finally, he understands they don't know how to tell him there is no one left to fight. Without his armor, he's naked and vulnerable. His very identity is in question.

Live. Perhaps he will find healing in normal activity. What is normal? The soldiers and sailors around him seem to know all about normal. They moved with purpose and worked in teams. He watched the crew complete their tasks before moving efficiently to the next. When the duty day ends, they met in groups and passed the time with playful recreation. He doesn't know the words, playful, normal or recreation.

Then late one night, at an hour when things often appear most hopeless, the Spartan found himself at a viewscreen staring out at the stars. It's been thirty days since they found him floating in the debris of the Didact's ship. In fact, it's the same place where Captain Lasky found him the first time. And just like that time, Captain Lasky managed to come upon him while he's so deep in thought, he doesn't hear the Skipper's footsteps.

"There you are, Chief," Captain Lasky said with a smile and waited for the Spartan to acknowledge his presence. "Come with me please." The CO used friendly tones, but it's an order all the same. Captain Lasky led him to the Infirmary. He's been here before, of course. This time, they walk through several rooms. Until, deep inside the Infirmary wing, they finally stopped at the end of a corridor with a locked door. Master Chief noticed the holographic lock and mused that he and Cortana would have made quick work of it.

Inside there are banks of medical equipment and the steady rhythmic beat of a heart monitor. Other than the sounds of equipment, the room is shadowed and silent. Then outside the edge of normal human hearing, he noticed something. It's the sound of breathing and a whimper and a sigh. He accurately concluded there must be a patient on the other side of the screens. Other than the lock, how is this more than routine? There have been no reports of injured Spartans. What is his role here?

"Why are you showing me this, sir?"

Lasky placed a hand on the Chief's shoulder— Unusual to be touched, but the touch is meant to comfort and it worked. The only one who ever touched him had been Cortana just before she died.

"Everybody out," Captain Lasky said to the medical staff. When they are alone with the sleeping form curled under a starched white sheet, Captain Lasky continued in a hushed voice, "Chief, the doctors said she's ready to wake up. I told them it was your right to do it."

The Master Chief cocked his head and waited for more information. There are more questions than answers here and so he waited.

"I'll explain everything later, Chief. It's time to wake up your sleeping princess." Lasky smiled again. The Spartan doesn't understand, but if Captain Lasky asked him to do something, he will always follow orders. And the Captain has always proved trustworthy.

Just visible above the sheet is a cap of straight black hair. So dark, the Spartan noted the lights reflected blue on some of the glossy strands.

"Miss?" He called out attempting to modulate his voice to what he hopes is a non-threatening tone.

There is no answering movement from the bed. No sign the female heard him. While the Master Chief pondered the reference 'sleeping princess', he took a step closer. When he moved, the patient turned over restlessly. Now that she's on her back, noticed the delicately boned face and full lips parted as she slept.

He doesn't understand why they expect him to do anything for this

female. What is her condition? He's field medic certified, but the medical staff is more qualified to care for her. Captain Lasky asked him to do this so he decided to try again.

"Miss?"

Delicate lids flashed open over dark indigo eyes and began to dart around the room. The Spartan may not always understand emotional cues from other humans, but the fear in her eyes is an easy read. He understands it, too. Like an enemy just out of his line of sight, ready to attack, it's been his constant companion these last thirty days. For a long second, they stared into each other's faces as their gaze caught and held. Master Chief shifted his feet for balance. He cannot control the flood of adrenaline coursing through him.

A cap of dark hair, small nose, and large wide-set eyes, which could always find their way into his soul. Odd to see her this way, dressed in, of all things, a simple hospital gown. Strange to see who dressedâ€|? How?

Like the wings of a frightened bird, her hands fly to her face and a muffled scream tore through her. The Spartan reached for her, but she threw up her hands to ward him off, only to catch sight of fingers attached to equally alien hands. She screamed again.

"Look at me," he ordered.

The terrified patient only struggled harder, her movements frantic. Her efforts only create additional fear when she discovered she's secured to the bed with a belt around her waist. Slender arms flail and attempt to free herself. The harder she tried to get away from the apparition in front of her and the straps holding her down, the more intense her panic. As if were trying to form words, guttural sounds began to emerge from her throat.

With a quick movement of his hands, he untied her. Should he try to touch her again? He wondered if there is some way to reach her, so he tried a recent memory. If this is an admission that he's looking at Cortana he denied it. Still, it's a memory so laced with pain it takes everything he has to get the words out.

"I was supposed to take care of you." His voice breaks on the last word. Perhaps he's going mad. Will there be freedom in madness? She might not recognize him. Is there even an image of him without armor in her database? He longed for her presence in his mind. Safe. Normal. Right.

"Cortana, listen to my voice. I won't try to touch you again, just listen to me."

She lay rigid with her eyes squeezed shut. For a long time, while he waited for her to relax, he watched the pulse throb in her slender throat. She's aliveâ€| But that not possible. He allowed himself to recognize the features of his girl; the blue-black hair and wide-set eyes belong to Cortana. _Come on, Chief. Take a girl for a ride._ His girl is alive and his hands moved unconsciously to touch the soft flesh. Of course, he has no idea how her skin should feel because he's never actually touched her. He is going mad; the carefully tended logic slipped from his grasp as he spread his hands over her shoulders.

"Listen, Cortana. You know the sound of my voice. When they remove my armor, I go through something like what you're feeling. I must learn to see out of my own eyes, touch with my own fingers. The lights are always too bright and sound too loud. It takes several hours, sometimes days."

She stopped fighting, but she shook off his touch and crossed her arms across her chest. Her hands remain balled into fists.

"Take one sense at a time, Cor... Miss. Open your eyes and look at me. Just your eyes."

The trembling began anew. Deep in her throat, she moaned.

Who are you, he wondered?. Can he really trust that thisâ€¦ this female really Cortana? Although there is so much that is familiar about the woman. This is no version of Cortana he has ever known. The silk of her hair slides across the rough skin of his fingers. Finally, it is the fear in her eyes he recognized and trusted. With his armor gone and no mission or direction, he's known this fear. Cortana would understand.

When she complied with his request, her eyes flash open and she placed a fierce grip his upper arms. He gave in to the protectiveness that has been growing in him since he entered the room. It is, after all, what he was created for.

With a large hand on her head, he said, "Don't be afraid. I-I promiseâ€¦ no one can harm you here."

The scream he watched rise in her throat shivered to a sob and rivulets of glimmering tears slipped down her cheeks. Should he attempt to embrace her? He's seen it done as a gesture of comfort. The last thing he held in his arms was an Elite. The only reason he'd gotten so close to it was to cut the thing's throat. When it fell backward into his arms he pushed the thing off the edge of a cliff.

Decision made, Master Chief moved closer to the female. She responded by pushing herself back against the pillows. But she can't get far and now he can see the blue veins under the nearly translucent fair skin, the short nails on long fingered hands clutching his arms. She hasn't let go of him.

"There is nothing to fear. You know I will protect you. Don't you."

The female lifted her face, the breath shuddered in her chest and spine straightened. When she finally raised her eyes to his the great Spartan heart that beat only for survival began to fill with life.

"We were supposed to protect each otherâ€¦" came out over a strained throat in a strangled whisper. But it is enough for him. A great black gout of grief boiled out of his gut. The only way he can hide it is to bury it. Loss of control is unacceptable, so hide the emotion, by pulling the frail looking woman toward him and plunging his face into her hair.

With her face buried against his chest, he's the only one who heard the words she whispered in childlike wonder.

"John? Is it you?"

Her hands find his face and she managed to pull away far enough to look up at him. This time, there is recognition in her eyes. He touched his forehead to hers in acknowledgment. His hands tremble as hot blood filled his heart. Holding himself still while she explored his features with her fingers. Although the gesture is unknown to both of them, it seemed right. So when she touched the wetness under his eyes, she impulsively tasted it and savored the salty flavor. There is a great hunger growing in her that she cannot identify. Does he feel it too? She shifted impatiently to move closer and he responded by lifting her from the mattress to his lap. Wrapped in his long, powerful arms, her fear dissipated quickly.

"I'm sorry I had to leave youâ€¦"

"Don'tâ€¦"

"Was I gone long?"

"Too long. Never leave me again, Cortana." She does not fear the savage edge to his voice because she knows this man and does not fear him.

"Yes, John. Can you explain what happened?"

"I-I don't knowâ€¦ I only know you are here."

"We will find the answers together. I hope I'm still your girl," she said with a hint of her usual humor. "There's something I've waited a long timeâ€¦"

"...just tell me," he responded by spreading his fingers possessively over her back. Does she wish him to pull down the stars or rearrange the universe to suit her? He can do it, he can to it because he is a Spartan. As the impish smile faded from her eyes and she turned serious, he knows he is her Spartan.

She touched his lips with her fingers. "Just thisâ€¦" and following her fingers with her lips, she pressed her mouth to his.

Yes, he mused, as he experienced the strange, erotic sensation of Cortana's mouth on his and the sensual movement of their lips began, he can do this too. He doesn't know the words erotic or sensual, but he can learn.

~o0o~

End
file.